

Executive Director's Report November 14, 2022

Amendments to the Ordinance

The package of amendments to the Governmental Ethics Ordinance and City Council Rules passed by the City Council on July 20 took effect October 1. We've published four new guides covering them, most pointedly the new restrictions on nepotism, recusals by elected officials, the lobbying ban on the floor of City Council (or Committee rooms) during Council or Committee meetings, and revised enforcement provisions, including raising the maximum fine for violations of the Ordinance to \$20,000 and the Board's ability to assess a fine equal to a violator's ill-gotten financial gains. On today's agenda, there is a formal advisory opinion addressing the expanded anti-nepotism provisions.

The amendments also add persons or entities who have done business with or sought to do business with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and Public Building Commission (PBC) to the list of those subject to the Ordinance's \$1,500 annual per candidate political contribution limit. We are working with the Office of the Mayor and the Department of Assets, Information and Services to improve the database of City and named sister agency contractors, and have a meeting to discuss this tomorrow.

We have on our website a color-coded version of the Ordinance showing all changes made since January 2018. See <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/Ordinances/GEO-2019-color%20through%20August%202022.pdf>

Education

On-line Training

For all employees and aldermen. To date, approximately 29,486 employees and 39 City Council members have completed the mandatory 2022 employees/elected officials' training. This represents ~87% of the expected City-wide total. This program must be completed before January 1, 2023; those who fail to complete it will be subject to daily fines of \$250 until they do, and to having their names and violations being made public. We are grateful to our colleagues at the Department of Human Resources for their invaluable assistance in migrating the training programs to the City's e-learning management platform, as well as assisting us with the sexual harassment portions of each year's training program. The migration enables users to take the training from *any* computer, including their home computers, and also saves the City \$5,000 in annual software licensing fees. Previous training programs were intentionally designed to be taken only from City computers, for security reasons.

For lobbyists. All 828 lobbyists completed the 2021-2022 mandatory annual training, which was also posted on the City-wide e-learning system. The deadline was before July 1, 2020. We will post the all-new 2022-2023 lobbyist training in the next two (2) weeks. The deadline for completing it will be before July 1, 2023.

For appointed officials. To date, 321 appointed officials have completed their training, which is ~63% of the total. They also have until the end of the year to complete it. As with the all-employee/elected official and lobbyist trainings programs, it is hosted on the City's e-learning platform. We are sending out weekly reminders.

Classes and other presentations We cancelled all in-person classes from March 2020 on, given the course of the pandemic. We are extending all training deadlines accordingly. All Board classes and educational programs cover sexual harassment. We will resume these classes as soon as it's feasible to do so.

Since the last meeting, we have conducted or will conduct the following classes (most virtually, one in person): (i) laborers from the Department of Streets & Sanitation, on October 28; (ii) Mayor's Office personnel on December 15; (iii) on October 25, employees of Connect Chicago Alliance, a vendor of the Department of Aviation; and (iv) on February 16, 2023, the Department of Aviation.

Advisory Opinions

Since the Board's last meeting, we have issued 328 informal advisory opinions—another busy period. The leading categories for informal opinions were, in descending order: Travel; Gifts; Political Activity; Lobbying; Campaign Financing; Outside Employment; and City property.

The leading City departments from which requesters came in this period were, in descending order: Police Department/Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA)/Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability (CCPSA); City Council; Mayor's Office; Chicago Public Library; Office of Inspector General; Department of Public Health; and Departments of Housing and Cultural Affairs and Special Events. About 75% of these inquiries came from City employees or elected officials, another 10% from lobbyists or potential lobbyists, and the rest from attorneys, vendors, candidates for elected City office, or campaign contributors.

Informal opinions are not made public but are logged, kept, and used for training and future advisory purposes. This same practice occurs with our colleagues at the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board, who issue roughly the same number of informal opinions. They form the basis for much of our annual and periodic educational programs. Formal opinions are made public, in full text, with names and other identifying information redacted out.

In the past five (5) years, the Board has issued 66 formal opinions. There is one (1) opinion on today's agenda for approval, involving the Ordinance's amended anti-nepotism provisions, which took effect on October 1, 2022.

Summary Index of Formal Advisory Opinions/Text of all Formal Advisory Opinions

The full text of every formal Board opinion issued since 1986 is posted on the Board's website (more than 920), redacted in accordance with the Ordinance's confidentiality provisions, here:

https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/auto_generated/reg_archives.html.

Redacted formal opinions are posted once issued or approved by the Board. Summaries and keywords for each of these opinions—and a link to each opinion's text, which we added since the August Board meeting—are available on the Board's searchable index of opinions, here:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/Publications/AOindex.docx>.

Only a few other ethics agencies have comparable research tools. We are unaware of jurisdictions that make their *informal* opinions public—though others issue them confidentially and enable requesters to rely on them in the event of an investigation or enforcement.

2022 Statements of Financial Interests

On February 28/March 1, as required by law, we notified 3,641 City employees and officials required to file 2022 Statements of Financial Interests ("FIS forms") of their requirement to file and provided the link to file electronically. Since then, 144 individuals were added as filers by their departments: new hires, and those whose positions were re-classified into titles requiring them to file. Note: as new filers are added by each department as new hires or promotions are made, these newly added filers receive their notice to file within 24 hours of being added to the system.

The filing deadline for the original 3,641 was May 2. We found 102 officials and employees in violation of the Ordinance, and fined them a total of \$40,600. There remains just one (1) employee who has not yet filed. We have sent letters to the Department Heads and City Council members for whom those found in violation work, and to the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and they have reported back to us on what disciplinary action they have taken.

Statements of Financial Interests filed by Candidates for Elected City Office

The Ordinance requires that all candidates for elected City office file a Statement within five days of qualifying as a candidate. Note that all currently serving elected officials running for re-election or for different offices from those they currently hold have filed. As soon as staff learns of new candidates, we inform them via certified and first class mail of their filing requirement. We post all candidates' forms on our website upon receipt, at this link:

https://www.chicago.gov/content/city/en/depts/ethics/supp_info/CandidateFIS2023.html

All current employees or officials who have already filed in 2022 and who are candidates have their forms posted here:

<https://webapps1.chicago.gov/efis/search>

Lobbyists Filings

Currently there are 828 registered lobbyists, and we have collected \$421,300 in registration fees for 2022. This represents 45.8% of our 2022 budget and 46% of our 2023 budget. We post updated lists of all lobbyists and their clients and contact information about once each month, at this link:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/LobbyistStuff/LISTS/LobbyistList.xls>

3rd Quarter Lobbying Activity Reports were due before 11:59:59 pm on October 20. As of today, 29 lobbyists were late, and on October 25 received written reminders to file by November 8, as required by law. All but nine (9) did. As required by law, on November 14, these nine (9) will be sent probable cause notices requiring them to filing by 11:59:59 p.m. on November 23 (or provide an acceptable excuse for not timely filing), or they will be found in violation of the Ordinance and fined \$1,000 per City business day, beginning midnight, November 24 until they file.

Personnel Rules Revisions

In conjunction with the Mayor's Office, Departments of Human Resources, Law, Buildings, Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, and others, we worked on updating the City Personnel Rules, which were last revised in 2014. In particular, we are assisting on revisions to Rule XXIX, entitled "Conflict of Interest," with respect to: (i) conforming the Rules to the current version of the Governmental Ethics Ordinance; and (ii) expanding that Rule to prohibit City employees from making certain recommendations as to the hiring of other City employees and to recommending vendors or tradespeople to persons who are subject to inspections, permit reviews, etc.

Department Consultations

In the last nine (9) months, we assisted the Department of Streets & Sanitation in revising its conflicts of interests policies with respect to recommending outside business to residents, at the request of the Mayor's Office and the Department's Commissioner. We also are still working with the Commission on Human Relations to formulate a policy governing its employees' service on non-profit and other boards. We also consulted with the Budget Office as to applicable ethics restrictions on the new Community Microgrants Program. And, at the Mayor's directive, we issued an ethics guide to evaluating and awarding CRP grants and contracts and as mentioned above, have offered each department a training session on the ethics guidelines.

Chicago Casino

As to the development of a Bally's Casino, we issued guidance on lobbying to all elected officials recently, at the Mayor's request, and we issued guidance on the restrictions in the Ordinance for the ~80 City employees and officials who worked on the process of selecting the Casino operator, also at Mayor's request. We have worked has worked closely with the Law Department, Mayor's Office, and the City's outside counsel (Taft, Stettinius and Hollister) to ensure that City personnel are informed of all reporting (and eventually, substantive ethics) requirements and prohibitions under the Illinois Gambling Act, 230 ILCS 10/1 et seq. Penalties for violating this law are severe: it is a Class 4 Felony under Illinois law, subjecting violators to fines up to \$25,000 and 1-3 years in prison. Note that the Gambling Act's reporting requirements are in addition to the restrictions in the Ethics Ordinance that would apply to those "applicants" who "communicate" with City officials or employees, such as the Ordinance's gifts restrictions and lobbyist registration requirements.

Waivers

Since July 1, 2013, the Board has had authority to grant waivers from certain provisions in the Ethics Ordinance. The Board has granted seven (7) and denied two (2). By law, we make all granted waivers public on our website.

Summary Index of Board-Initiated Regulatory Actions/Adjudications/pre-2013 Investigations

We post a summary index of all investigations, enforcement and regulatory actions undertaken by the Board since its inception in 1986 (other than those for violations of filing or training requirements or campaign financing matters). It includes an ongoing summary of all regulatory actions the Board undertook without an IG investigation. See <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/EnforcementMatters/Invest-Index.pdf>

The Board makes public the names of all violators and penalties it assesses when authorized by law to do so. There have been, to date, 133 such matters. But only in those that occurred after July 1, 2013, can the Board release the names of those found to have violated the Ordinance. Since July 1, 2013, alone, there have been 62 such matters.

Summary Index of Ongoing/Past IG/LIG Investigations/Adjudications

There are currently no completed IG ethics investigations awaiting adjudication.

We post on our website and continually update an ongoing investigative record showing the status of every completed

investigation brought to the Board by both the Office of Inspector General (13 since July 1, 2013) and the former Office of the Legislative Inspector General (“LIG”), since January 1, 2012, and the status of all 50 petitions to commence investigations presented to the Board by the LIG. We update it as appropriate, consistent with the Ordinance’s confidentiality provisions. *See*

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/EnforcementMatters/PulbicScorecard.pdf>

Whenever the IG presents the Board with a completed ethics investigation in which the IG believes there have been violations of the Governmental Ethics Ordinance, the procedure that follows is governed by §2-156-385(3) and (4) of the Ordinance: the Board reviews the IG’s report, recommendations, and the entirety of the evidence submitted in its completed ethics investigation, including a review to ensure that the IG conformed with the requirement that it complete ethics investigations within two (2) years of commencing them (unless there is evidence that the subject took affirmative action to conceal evidence or delay the investigation), and that ethics investigations were commenced within five (5) years of the last alleged act of misconduct.

Then, if the Board finds that the evidence presented warrants a *prima facie* finding of probable cause to believe the subject violated the Ordinance, it notifies the subject of the allegations and affords the subject the opportunity to present written submissions and meet with the Board, together with an attorney or other representative present. The Ordinance provides that this meeting is *ex parte* – no one from the City’s Law Department or IG is present. Note that the Board may request clarification from the IG as to any evidence adduced in its investigation before making a probable cause finding (and indeed has done so). The Board cannot administer oaths at this meeting but can and does assess the subject’s credibility and the validity and weight of any evidence the subject provides.

If the subject does not rebut the Board’s *prima facie* probable cause finding, the Board may enter into a public settlement agreement—or the Board or subject may decide to proceed to a merits hearing that is not open to the public. That hearing would be held before an administrative law judge (ALJ) appointed by the Department of Administrative Hearings. The City would be represented by the Law Department (or a specially hired Assistant Corporation Counsel for that purpose), and the subject by their attorney. At the conclusion of the hearing, the ALJ submits findings of fact and law to the Board, which can accept or reject them, based solely on the written record of the hearing. The Board will then issue a public opinion in which it may find violations of the Ethics Ordinance, or find none, and impose appropriate fines.

The process may seem cumbersome. However, it was added to the Ordinance on July 1, 2013, based on specific recommendations of then-Mayor Emanuel’s Ethics Reform Task Force in Part II of its 2012 Report—the primary purposes being to: (i) guarantee due process for all those investigated by the IG (or former LIG); (ii) ensure that **only** the Board of Ethics could make determinations as to whether a person investigated by the IG violated the Ordinance, given the Board’s extensive jurisprudence and unique expertise in ethics matters; and (iii) balance due process for those investigated by the IG with an accurate adjudication by the Board and the public’s right to know of ethics violations.

On our website, we have a publication describing this process in detail:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/Publications/EnforceProcedures.pdf>

Note: fines range from \$500-\$2,000 per violation for non-lobbying law violations that occurred before September 29, 2019, and \$1,000-\$5,000 per violation for such violations occurring between September 29, 2019 and September 30, 2022. For violations occurring on or after October 1, 2022, the fine range is between \$500 and \$20,000 per violation, and the Board may also assess a fine equal to any ill-gotten financial gains as a result of any Ordinance violation. Fines for unregistered lobbying violations remain at \$1,000 per day beginning on the fifth day after the individual first engaged in lobbying and continuing until the individual registers as a lobbyist, although the maximum fine for a person who

Please note finally that, in all matters adjudicated or settled on or after July 1, 2013, the Board makes public the names of all violators and penalties assessed, or a complete copy of the settlement agreement. All settlement agreements are posted here: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/provdrs/reg/svcs/SettlementAgreements.html>

Disclosures of Past Violations

July 2013 amendments to the Ordinance provide that, when a person seeks advice from the Board about past conduct and discloses to the Board facts leading it to conclude that they committed a past violation of the Ordinance, the Board must determine whether that violation was minor or non-minor. If it was minor, the Board, by law, sends the person a

confidential letter of admonition. If it was non-minor, then, under current law, the person is advised that they may self-report to the IG or, if he or she fails to do so within two (2) weeks, the Board must make that report. In 11 matters, the Board has determined that minor violations occurred, and the Board sent confidential letters of admonition, as required by the Ordinance. These letters are posted on the Board's website, with confidential information redacted out.

Litigation

Lee v. City of Chicago. In June 2020, the City was sued in Cook County Circuit Court, Chancery Division, by a former City employee of the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA). The case is *Jason W. Lee v. City of Chicago*, 2020 CH 04524. The plaintiff left City employment on February 28, 2020, and works as an attorney for the Policemen's Benevolent and Protective Association ("PBPA"). His suit alleges that the post-employment provisions of the Ordinance are unconstitutionally vague, and that the City is improperly attempting to regulate the practice of law by Illinois attorneys. It asked for a declaratory judgment and permanent injunction prohibiting the City from enforcing these restrictions against him. After the matter was briefed by both sides, on July 31, 2020, the Honorable Anna Demacopoulos denied the plaintiff's request for a temporary restraining order. The plaintiff was granted leave to file an amended complaint, and filed one, adding an as-applied constitutional challenge. The City moved to dismiss the entire matter. On February 25, 2021, Judge Demacopoulos granted the City's motion to dismiss concerning the facial challenge to sections 100(a) and (b) and also the as-applied challenge to section 100(a). The court, however, denied the motion concerning the as-applied challenge to section 100(b), but expressed concern that this claim may be moot. Count III was also dismissed; it asked for a declaratory judgment that, by enforcing the Ordinance, the City is violating PBPA members' right to "counsel of their choice." However, the court granted plaintiff leave to amend the complaint for all of the dismissed counts. Following the court's order on the City's motion to dismiss, the plaintiff was given leave to file an amended complaint, but he never did. Instead, he decided to move forward on the as-applied vagueness challenge to section 100(b) of the Ordinance. This is the only claim that survived the motion to dismiss. Judge Demacopoulos questioned whether this claim was moot in light of the expiration of the one year ban that applied to the plaintiff but left it up to the plaintiff whether he wanted to pursue the claim. Plaintiff may seek compensatory damages if he can prove that he suffered damage. The City filed its answer and affirmative defenses to the amended complaint on April 26, 2021. The plaintiff filed discovery requests. Board legal staff met with our attorneys in the Law Department and forwarded materials necessary to respond to these requests. There have been discussions regarding possible settlement of the matter as well, but the offer made by plaintiff to settle the matter was rejected. We had a settlement conference with the Plaintiff and Judge Demacopoulos and our respective attorneys on October 18. There will be more on matter this in Executive Session.

Note: several PBPA members filed grievances under their collective bargaining agreement, alleging that their right "to counsel of their choice" was violated by COPA. These were settled on terms that do not affect the Ethics Ordinance's post-employment provisions.

Brookins v. Board of Ethics, et al. This matter is assigned to the Honorable David Atkins in the Chancery Division of Cook County Circuit Court. The Board's and my attorneys have moved to dismiss the entire lawsuit and have submitted briefs. We await a decision. Alderman Brookins is not running for re-election.

Czosnyka et al. v. Gardiner et al., docket number is 21-cv-3240. We and the City of Chicago are now dismissed out of this case. On June 17, six (6) individuals residing in the 45th Ward filed a lawsuit in United States District Court against 45th Ward Ald. James Gardiner and the City, alleging that their 1st Amendment rights were violated by the Ald.'s improper blocking of them on his "official" City social media accounts. The plaintiffs sought certification of a class of all those improperly blocked by the Ald. The suit also alleged that more than 20 complaints of improper blocking were filed with the Board and the IG, but the City "failed to take any action to reprimand Alderman Gardiner, although it has the power to do so," and thus "acquiesced in [the Alderman's] constitutional violations." It seeks to have the plaintiffs reinstated as full participants in these social media accounts and unspecified damages. The case is before the Honorable Judge Sharon J. Coleman.

On October 26, 2021, Judge Coleman granted the City's motion to dismiss it from the suit, and on January 12, 2022, denied the plaintiffs' motion to reconsider her decision. Plaintiffs could appeal this decision to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. The residents sought to hold the City liable under the "failure to discipline" *Monell* theory of municipal liability. Specifically, they argued that the City should be held liable for failing to investigate Ald. Gardiner through the IG and also for failing to fine him through the Board of Ethics.

Note that Ald. Gardiner retained independent counsel and moved to dismiss the suit on the basis that the social media site does not constitute an “official City site.” On February 10, 2022, Judge Coleman denied that motion, writing that

“plaintiffs have plausibly alleged that Alderman Gardiner restricted their access to a public forum in violation of the First Amendment by barring them or deleting their comments from the interactive portions of his Facebook Page that designates Alderman Gardiner as a government official. These facts raise a reasonable inference that plaintiffs are not alone in suffering constitutional injuries resulting from Alderman Gardiner’s practices. Moreover, plaintiffs have set forth sufficiently detailed allegations that Alderman Gardiner knowingly banned constituents and engaged in content-based regulation of speech on his Facebook Page. Further, he did so unilaterally while seeking out engagement from users.”

On June 1, 2022, both the Board and IG received subpoenas from the plaintiff for internal records on this matter. We coordinated our response with the Law Department.

Open Meetings Act Challenges

The Board is now involved in two challenges recently filed with the Illinois Attorney General by the same objector regarding its discussions in Executive Session. The Board is working with the Law Department on each, and we will have updates in Executive Session.

Freedom of Information Act

Since the last Board meeting, the Board has received four (4) requests.

The first was addressed to several departments requesting contract and other records; we responded per the Law Department’s advice.

The second was a City-wide request, requesting certain FOIA responses and FOIA requests; we responded per the Law Department’s advice.

The third was for a list of OIG complainants from May 2019-October 2022; we advised that we are the wrong department, have no responsive records, and that such information is confidential.

The fourth was for complaints filed with another department; we advised that we were the wrong department and had no records.

Employee Vaccination Status

I’m pleased to report that all seven (7) staff members are fully vaccinated for Covid-19, and in compliance with the City’s policy on vaccinations.